

# Sequachee Valley News.

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## FROM CLUE TO CLIMAX.

BY  
WILL N.  
HARBEN.

ILLUSTRATIONS  
BY FRANK

AUTHOR OF

"WHITE MARIE"

"ALMOST PERSUADED"

"A MUTE CONFESSOR"

"THE LAND OF THE

CHANGING SUN" ETC.

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### CHAPTER I.

The milkman left a can of milk on the front veranda and drove on to the next house in the street. The teeman came along half an hour later, looked curiously at the closed door, as he unfasted the hooks from a block of ice, and rapped loudly on the step, but no one came to answer his call.

An hour later a young man sleeping in the front room downstairs awoke suddenly and sat up in bed. He was astonished to note that the sunlight on the carpet extended from the window far into the room, indicating that the sun had risen above the tall buildings across the street. He felt a strange heaviness in his head, and a desire to lie down again, but he shook off the feeling and rose and began to dress.

What could be the matter? The little clock on his dressing case pointed to ten. What had caused him to oversleep? Why had Mr. Strong not waked him as usual? The old man was always up with the sun, and had never allowed him to sleep later than eight.

The young man hurriedly put on his trousers, thrust his feet into his slippers, and drew aside the portiere that hung between his room and his uncle's. Strong's bed was in the right-hand corner of the room, and Whidby could see the back part of his head and one side of his gray whiskers.

Whidby called to him softly, but Strong did not stir. Whidby called again, and stamped his foot, but still the old man remained motionless.

"That's queer," murmured Whidby, as he approached the bed. Strong's face was towards the window; his eyes were open; a ghastly smile was on his face. He was dead. Whidby saw that by the awful pallor of his face, which made each hair of the beard stand out as if under a magnifying glass. For a moment Whidby stood as if turned to stone; then he drew down the sheet, which had been drawn up closely under the old man's chin, and saw the long deep gash in the throat and the dark clots of the blood which had soaked into the mattress.

Whidby was strangely calm. In an instant he had decided on a course of action. He stepped to the telephone across the room, and looked over the directory; then he rang, and held the receiver to his ear.

"Hello," he said, "that's the central office, isn't it? Well, all right; one seventy-six on four eighty-two, please."

"Well, what is it?" presently came from the telephone.

"Is that police headquarters?"

"Yes."

"I am Alfred Whidby, 278 Leighton avenue. A horrible thing has occurred here during the night. I have just discovered that my uncle, Mr. Strong—Richard N. Strong, the banker—has been murdered. Come and attend to it."

There was a silence, broken by a low, indistinct murmuring as if people were talking at the other end of the wire; then the reply came:

"All right; as soon as we can get there."

Then Whidby hung up the receiver and rang the bell. He went back into his room, put on his shirt, collar and necktie, and brushed his hair. His head still felt heavy and ached a little. The electric cars were whirling past the house, and a blind man was playing an accordion a few doors away. There was a crunching step on the gravelled walk near his window. Whidby raised the sash and looked out. It was Matthews, the gardener.

Seeing Whidby, he touched his hat, stopped, and asked after Mr. Strong. Whidby made no reply, but sat down on the window-sill and stared at the old man. He was wondering if the police would prefer for him to keep the news from the gardener. It was the look of slow astonishment coming into Matthews' eyes that made him decide what to say.

"Matthews," he said, "something has happened; I can tell you that much, but that is all. I have telephoned the police; you'd better not come in till they get here. If I were you I'd go on with my work; the rose bushes near the fountain need trimming."

Matthews stared and started to speak, but Whidby withdrew, sat down on the side of his bed and tried to collect his thoughts. Suddenly he was roused by a sharp ring at the door bell. Whid-

by's heart sank, and he was all in a quiver, but he rose calmly and went to the door. It was a boy with the morning paper. He held also a bill in his hand, and wanted to collect the money due to him for delivering the paper for the month past, but Whidby sent him away, and stood for several minutes in the doorway watching the crowd passing in the street. Then he closed the door, and went into his uncle's room and walked restlessly to and fro at the foot of the bed. Suddenly he stopped at the telephone and rang the bell.

"One seventy-five on four eighty-two, please," he said.

"Hello there," was the reply.

"Well?" said Whidby.

"You are one seventy-six instead of one seventy-five, aren't you?"

"Yes. Did I say one seventy-five? I meant one seventy-six."

"All right; there you are, Mr. Whidby."

"Whidby?" thought the young man. "I wonder how he knew my name. Ah, he must have overheard me speaking to the police."

The bell rang.

"Hello," said Whidby. "Is that police headquarters?"

"Yes. What is it?"

"This is Alfred Whidby, 278 Leighton avenue."

"I know; but what is wrong now?"

"I telephoned you about the murder up here. Aren't you going to send some one to see about it?"

"That was only a few minutes ago, Mr. Whidby, and it is over two miles. Capt. Welsh has just left with Mr. Minard Hendricks, the famous New York detective, who happens to be in town."

"Ah, I see," said Whidby; "the time drags with me, you know. I am all alone."

"I understand. Good-by."

"Good-by."

The young man turned and walked round the bed for another look at Strong's face. Surely, he thought, the weird smile and the twinkle in the dead man's eyes were the most remarkable things ever connected with a murder case. He could not bear to look at the face, so he went into his own room. He wondered what had caused him to oversleep. He went to his bed and smelt the pillows to see if he could detect traces of chloroform. He had decided that he could not have been drugged when the bell of a passing car caught his ear. He knew that the car had stopped in front of the house by the whirling, chromatic sound as it started on again. Then he heard steps on the veranda and went to the door.

### CHAPTER II.

It was Capt. Welsh, the chief of police, and Mr. Minard Hendricks, the detective from New York. The latter scarcely nodded when he was introduced to Whidby. His sharp, gray eyes, under massive, shaggy brows, rested on the key which he had just heard Whidby turn in the lock.

"Has no one been out at this door this morning?" he asked, abruptly.

"No," stammered Whidby—"yes; that is, I came to answer the ring of a new-boy a moment ago."

"And you locked the door after he left?"

"Yes."

"Why did you do it?" The detective eyes were roving about the veranda, his and yard, but his tone sounded sharp and to the point. Whidby felt that he was waiting for a reply.

"I don't know," replied the young man, helplessly. "I suppose I was excited, and it seemed to me that it would be best to keep curious people out till you came."

"Certainly," replied Capt. Welsh; but the detective went on with a frown:

"Was the door unlocked when you opened it for the new-boy?"

"I—I'm afraid I can't remember," answered Whidby.

"That is unfortunate," said Hendricks.

"Where is the body?"

"This way," replied Whidby. "The second door on the right."

The detective opened the door, and the others followed him to the bed.

He looked long and silently at the face of the dead man; then he said: "Has anyone touched this sheet since you discovered the murder?"

"I drew it down to see where he was wounded. If I had thought—"

"No matter," replied the detective.

and he lifted the sheet and examined the gash. Then he replaced it carefully, and asked: "How was the sheet arranged when you found him?"

"Just as it is now, I think," said Whidby. "Just as if the murderer had replaced it with both hands, one on each side, as you did."

"Stand where you are," Hendricks suddenly ordered. He raised the window-shade, went down on his hands and knees, and made a minute examination of the carpet. Then he rose and surveyed the room. "Where did you sleep?" he asked.

Whidby pointed to the portiere. "In that room."

The detective drew the heavy curtains aside.

"You came through here this morning?" he asked.

"Yes."

Hendricks looked at Whidby's bed.

"Slept later than usual this morning, eh?" he asked.

"Yes; I don't know what was the matter with me. I felt heavy-headed and dizzy when I awoke."

Capt. Welsh nodded knowingly, but said nothing.

"You telephoned as soon as you discovered the body?" Hendricks went on.

"Yes."

"Where do you get your meals?"

"Here, usually; but to-day the cook is away on leave of absence. Uncle and I were going over to the Randolph, the restaurant on the corner, for our meals till she returned."

"Have you eaten anything this morning?"

"No."

"Well, you'd better go; we'll look after everything and telephone the coroner."

"All right," replied Whidby. He turned to the wash-stand and filled a basin from a pitcher of water. "In my excitement I forgot to wash my face and hands."

"Stop!" cried Hendricks, and he caught Whidby's arm as his hands were almost in the water. "Pardon me, but you've stained your fingers somehow."

The young man stared at his right hand in surprise. There was a faint red smudge on the thumb and fingers.

"Why," he said, "I don't see how it could have got there, unless— I wonder if—" Whidby turned quickly into the other room and bent over Strong's bed.

"Ah!" he cried, to the others.

"See! I must have got it from the corner of the sheet when I put it back; you see there is blood on the under side."

The detective had followed Whidby no further than the portiere, where he

stood idly watching the young man's movements.

"Yes, from the sheet or this curtain," he replied, pointing to an almost invisible spot of blood on the portiere.

"Then the fellow must have been in my room, too," said Whidby, wondering.

"And just after the deed was done," Hendricks remarked.

The young man stared at the detective curiously as he returned to the washstand and took off his coat.

"Look," he cried to him, "here is some of it on my cuff."

"I noticed that," replied the detective. "It is a drop of blood. Perhaps you had better detach the cuff and give it to me. You did not sleep in that shirt?"

"No," Whidby gave him the cuff.

"Where did you lay the shirt last night when you took it off?"

"On that chair near my bed," answered Whidby.

"That is all you can do for us," said Hendricks. "You'd better go to breakfast."

Whidby crossed the street and entered the restaurant on the corner. He took a seat at the table farthest from the door and ordered some eggs, coffee, and butter; but he found that he had no appetite, and he drank his coffee when it was so hot that it burnt his lips. Then he bought a newspaper and sat for ten minutes gazing at it absently.

In his return home he found the yard full with a crowd of curious people. Some of them stood on the veranda near the windows. The door was closed. Whidby tried the knob, but it was locked. Turning, he saw Matthews coming round the corner of the house.

"Capt. Welsh asked me to send you in

at the rear door," the man said.

"They're going to hold an inquest on 'im," Whidby followed the gardener into the house. How he disliked to see the body again, and the strange smile on the dead man's face! But there was no help for it. He must do what he could towards bringing the criminal to justice.

The atmosphere of Strong's room was so close that Whidby could hardly breathe, and the perfume from the conservatory sickened him. The coroner and his jury had arrived. Indeed, they seemed to be waiting for him. He sat down near a window. He wondered what they would ask him, and if he could make intelligent replies.

The coroner opened the proceedings with a few words to the jury, and Whidby thought they stared at him furtively whenever his name was mentioned.

Then his testimony was called for, and Whidby felt that he was repeating word for word the account he had given Hendricks a short while before.

The detective rose next and told in careful detail how the police had been called to the telephone by Whidby and first informed of the murder; how the young man had met him and Welsh at the door, and what was said about whether the door was locked. He spoke of the blood stain on Whidby's hand and produced the cuff with the drop of blood on it. It was his opinion, he said, that the cuff could not have been over at the time it received the drop, nor for at least half an hour afterwards, for, as the jury could see, the blood had dried in such a shape as to prove that it had remained motionless for some time. Mr. Whidby had said that the shirt with the cuff attached had lain on a chair near his bed all night.

Then the coroner called for Whidby's nightshirt, and the jury passed it from one to the other and examined it carefully. At that moment Whidby rose to call attention to the blood on the portiere and on the corner of the sheet, which he thought Hendricks and Capt. Welsh had forgotten to mention, but the coroner ordered him, rather coldly, to sit down.

Matthews was next called, but he could testify to nothing except that he slept in the cottage behind the house and had not waked during the night. Then the coroner requested Whidby and Matthews to leave the room, and Whidby went into the library across the hall and closed the door behind him.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

### THE LOCOMOTIVE ENGINEER.

His Sweetheart's Red Hair Acted as a Signal in Time of Danger.

A locomotive engineer should be one of the most truthful of men. That's why this little story of a southern engineer should be believed implicitly.

"You may talk as you please about red-headed women," he was saying to a group of listeners, "but a red-headed woman saved my life and established a house for herself all at once. I was 25 then and running a freight on the Chesapeake & Ohio in the West Virginia mountains, where it took talent to run an engine. My division ended at Hinton and a red-headed girl lived six miles to the east, where there was a siding near a big cut and fill, and it was a bad place, as the road was new."

"The girl's name was Maggie Conroy and she had the reddest head I ever saw on a human being's shoulders outside of a torchlight procession. But I didn't care for that and I did care for Maggie. One sunny day I was coming down the track with a stock train loaded with some extra fine cattle and sheep and I had in the caboose three of the owners. It had been raining and wash-outs were looked for, but I hadn't seen any and was bowling along at a good speed when all of a sudden the curve I thought I saw a red light rising just over the track. It seemed to shine like a blaze in the track and before I took time for a thought I had shut off the steam, whistled down the brakes and was doing my best to stop."

"Right then my fireman gave me the ha ha in a way to chill the blood in the veins of a man who can't stand teasing and I took a look forward and found that the red light I thought I saw was only Maggie's head of red hair sticking up in advance as she pulled herself up the steep embankment to get on to the track. With an oath I opened every throttle again, but as I did so Maggie threw up her hands and dropped in a dead faint by the track and I stopped off everything again, for I felt sure that something was wrong. I had half an hour or so leeway between trains and I took Maggie up as quickly as I could to find out what was the matter. She came around mighty soon, because she had fainted from overexertion, and she told me how a big bowlder had fallen on the track in a curve near her house that I wouldn't have seen till it was too late to stop and she had run across the spur of the mountain to stop me in time if she could."

"That's what she was trying to do when her red head shone like a danger signal and stopped me. Later the owners of the stock gave her money enough to buy a nice little house at Hinton and six months later I moved in. We've got the house yet, but we don't live in it," concluded the engineer, "for it wasn't big enough for a family of six children and not a red-headed one in the lot."—Washington Star.

—Man, if you are anything, walk alone, and talk to others. Do not hide yourself in the chorus.—Epictetus.

and he lifted the sheet and examined the gash. Then he replaced it carefully, and asked: "How was the sheet arranged when you found him?"

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[TO BE CONTINUED.]

## WHITE HOUSE DINNERS.

They Are Magnificent, Elaborate and Perfect Functions.

Description of a State Dinner given by the President to the Diplomats Residing at Washington.

[Special Washington Letter.]

There will be no more diplomatic dinners at the white house during this season. The social customs of nations are amusing and ridiculous to men who do not believe in any sort of temperance.

During the next eight or nine months the president of the United States will probably be able to maintain friendly relations with the diplomatic representatives of foreign nations in this city without giving them meat and drink. During each winter season, however, it is expected that the president shall give a series of dinners; which are served after dark, where food of the most costly kind in great abundance is served and washed down with gallons of champagne and other wines.

The diplomatic dinners at the white house have made trouble on more than one occasion. A familiar instance was that of the British minister Merry, who made a great row because some other lady was taken in to the table by Thomas Jefferson before Mrs. Merry. During the Garfield administration Mrs. Blaine actually left the president's board in anger because she had not the place to which she considered herself entitled. The plan adopted of making the order of precedence among the diplomats depend simply on length of service here is an admirable solution of the problem on the whole.

The various ambassadors and ministers located in Washington give dinners to the secretary of state and the assistant secretary. They also entertain our senators and representatives in a similar manner. The president gives receptions and dinners to the members of the supreme court and to the senators and representatives during the entire ante-Lenten season.

At the diplomatic dinner at the white house the British ambassador is given the seat of honor because he is regarded as the dean of the diplomatic corps, on account of his seniority of rank by continuous service at this capital.

The president offers his arm to the wife of the British ambassador and leads the way to the dining-room, followed by the diplomats and the ladies of their families. The president stands beside his seat in the middle of one side of the long table, and remains standing, until all of the ladies and gentlemen have found their way to their respective places. All then take their seats and the banquet begins.

When the guests arrive at the white house they are escorted upstairs, the gentlemen going to the library and the ladies to one of the larger bedrooms in order to remove their wraps. Presently they go down to the large east room, where the president and his wife are

found awaiting to receive them. Promptly at eight o'clock the steward of the white house opens the door of the state dining-room and bows to the president, who thereupon leads the procession to the table.

Before going downstairs to dinner each one of the gentlemen finds on a table in the library an envelope addressed to himself, unsealed, with the American eagle in gold stamped on the envelope. Within the envelope each gentleman discovers a card with beveled and gilded edges, bearing the name of the lady whom he is to take to dinner. On the back of the card is a diagram of the table with the seats numbered. Two numbers are struck out with a pen, thus indicating to the gentleman receiving the card where he and his partner for the evening are to sit at the table. Thus it is practically impossible for any error to be made in seating the guests at these big banquets.

The last president's reception was indefinitely postponed because of the sinking of the battle ship Maine, whereby so many of our sailors lost their lives. That dreadful catastrophe shocked the civilized world, and it caused thrills of horror in this city. There was such a spontaneous burst of sentiment that even society quailed before it, and all social affairs were brought to a sudden termination. Thus it happened that the social rounds were stopped at the white house; and, now that Lent is here, they will not be resumed during the present season.

It is not generally known that it is the duty of the president to accept an invitation to dine with an ambassador,

but that it is beneath his dignity to dine with a minister plenipotentiary. Ambassadors are the incarnation of their sovereigns. The British ambassador represents Queen Victoria, and for that reason he may personally call upon the president on official business at the white house. But the minister from Turkey or from China cannot call thus upon the president. On the contrary, the ministers must transact all of their diplomatic business with our department of state. The ambassadors outrank all other diplomats.